

Girl from the North Country by **lollercakes**

Series: [Now and Then \[1\]](#)

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Summary:

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Once upon a time he'd loved Bob Dylan. Had found solace in the man's rocky voice and solemn guitar. But now all it did was remind him of a girl he'd left back in this town who had sent him Dylan lyrics when he was fighting in Vietnam.

Girl from the North Country

If you're travelin' in the North Country fair

Where the winds hit heavy on the borderline

Remember me to one who lives there

For she once was a true love of mine

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Swiping at the dial, he shuts the radio off and throws his truck into park in front of the rundown trailer he'd purchased a few weeks ago. It'd been available and in his post-divorce budget, but the real selling feature had been how far out of town it was. Sure, he'd come back to be Hawkins Chief of Police, but that didn't mean he actually wanted to live around other people. No, he much preferred the quiet and the way the creek out back had a slow fog on cool mornings.

"Look what the cat dragged back in." A familiar voice calls out from his porch, the shadows of the evening hiding everything but the lit end of her cigarette.

"Hi to you too," he grunts and reaches to the passenger seat to grab his six pack of beer. Before he steps away from the protection of his truck he lights a cigarette of his own and inhales until the heat burns his lungs. He knew it would be impossible to avoid her, but he'd convinced himself that he could at least get away with settling in before they'd run into one another. "What are you doing here, Joyce?"

"I could ask you the same thing," she counters, crossing her legs and arms as he comes to join her on the porch. He snaps off a beer and offers it to her before cracking open his own and settling down on the steps with his back to her.

"It's a job." He shrugs and ashes his smoke. Her sigh is audible from over his shoulder and it grates on him. She didn't get to be annoyed. She could have just stayed away and they could have avoided this homecoming. She didn't need to remind him of everything he'd left behind.

They sit in silence for an awkward moment, smoking and drinking and neither of them admitting what had brought them together after all these years. He didn't really have an answer for why he'd come back, or at least not one that he would admit out loud.

"Are you back for good or...?" She lets the question die as her voice lowers, hesitates and stops.

"For now, I guess so." He finishes his beer and crushes the can in his hand, reaching back to grab another one. "Are you still with Lonnie?" It's out before he can think it through and he cringes as the sentence ends, wishing he could pull it back and tuck it away forever.

"Not really. I'm saving up for a lawyer." The admission catches him off guard and he turns to face her, shock evident even in the low light. "He doesn't know it, but I'm kicking his ass out. I can't take another fight with him."

"I'm glad to hear that. The boys at the station... They gave me a briefing this morning." He doesn't say it outright but he says enough to share that he's heard about their fights. Heard about the hospitalizations and the calls to the station.

"It wasn't as bad as they probably made it out to be," she snaps back.

Shaking his head, he turns his body so that he's fully facing her, beer clutched in his hands until the can is dented. "I'm not judging you, Joyce. I'd never judge you for that." He watches as her head lowers and she anxiously twists her hands around the can, shoulders bunching up to her ears.

"I heard about what happened in Chicago," she pauses, talking to her shoes as she hears him audibly exhale. His breathing stutters, a tell-tale sign that she recognizes from her youth. When she looks up his eyes are glistening in the light from the porch and her own chest aches. "I'm so sorry, Hop," she whispers. That seems to break him, his eyes closing and his face crumbling.

She watches it happen, watches him wipe at his cheeks and press his fingers to the bridge of his nose, before she gives in and joins him on the step. First it's her hands that bracket his cheeks, thumbs brushing away the tears. Then it's her arms that pull him close so she can hold him against her chest, his too tall and too wide frame curling against her.

"Hey now, hey, it's going to be okay," she sighs and rubs her hand over his back like she'd do for her boys after a bad dream. Only this wasn't a bad dream, it was life. People lived, they died, others survived. But it was never supposed to be a child.

The moment doesn't last long, he doesn't let it. Swallowing a deep breath and sniffing, he sits up and finishes his beer before taking a long drag on his dying cigarette. Joyce watches as his face shifts from misery to defeat, his brow furrowed even as he sighs. She can't help herself as her hand reaches out once more to his face, fingers lightly shifting his hair back from his eyes.

"Joyce," his voice cracks, his eyes closing with the feel of her. The memory of her touch on his skin burns through the sorrow and he leans into it, craving the comfort and warmth that she offers.

The last time she'd touched him had been like this. Born out of tragedy after he'd received his draft papers, Joyce had taken the news stoically as they sat in his father's truck. He'd fallen apart when she'd offered a dream for after the war, a time when he'd come home and they'd pick up where they were leaving off. She'd held him and then kissed him, her words comforting until he pulled up to the diner where she worked and let her leave. It'd been the last time he let her get close, shutting himself off and putting a wall between them that she couldn't break through no matter how many letters she sent.

But she was breaking through now. The walls had weakened over

time, softened with Diane and Sara, with his mother's death and his father's illness. He didn't have the energy to keep them up anymore and Joyce was here, warm and gentle and with so much history that he couldn't fight it.

So he doesn't. When he opens his eyes she's there, close enough for him to lean in and meet his lips with hers. She doesn't pull back like he half expects, instead she stays frozen in her spot, fingers tangled in his hair. He takes it as acceptance and presses in closer, his own hand coming up and sliding across her collar. It's enough to bring her around and she pulls back, eyes wide as she looks at him.

"Jim," she whispers and it's the sound of his past, her voice like a memory.

"Please, just... Joyce," he replies. Closing his eyes he leans his forehead against hers and let's his hand flex on her neck. He needs this. Needs her and her strength. Needs anything but the way he feels in this moment.

She doesn't make him wait before she ghosts her lips over his, tentative and soft. It's like the band around his body slips and the tension releases, an exhale and a groan escaping him. The taste of beer and cigarettes is a heady memory and he savours it, deepening the kiss until both palms are cupping her face and he's pulling her to him.

They barely come up for air as they come together, breaking only to draw back and stumble inside. Hands on skin, Joyce holds on as he pulls them towards his bedroom, his hands pulling free her shirt and discarding it along the way. She doesn't hesitate with his belt, unclasping the hook and sliding it free with a smile on her lips.

"You've gotten better at that," he mumbles between nips along her neck, his large frame leaning over her as his hands undo her bra.

"Yeah - and you've gotten better at that," she counters with a laugh, snaking her arms up to her shoulders to hold the white fabric in place. He feels the withdrawal before he sees it, stepping back and taking in the sight of this self-conscious woman hiding behind herself.

“Joyce.” He lifts a finger to her chin and tilts it up towards him, kissing her until her hands drop away and she wraps her arms around his neck instead. “You’re so beautiful... Always were,” he sighs and sits on the edge of the bed to bring him closer to her height.

“Stop with the small talk already,” she rasps before pushing him back and running her hands down his sides to his hips. Making quick work of his pants she stands back and admires her handiwork as his boxers bulge. Her own jeans feel too tight as she looks down at him appreciatively, her fingers twisting the button before slowly working them down her legs. Clad only in their underwear, she crawls onto the bed and lays down with her head resting on his shoulder.

“Oh, is that it?” He chuckles, glancing at her mischievously.

She groans and lifts her leg over his hips, her arm settling on his ribs. “It was good, wasn’t it?” Her expression is playful, a far cry from where they were only moments ago. He’s not surprised by the change though, they’d always had fun together, even that first awkward time. Something about growing up together had given them permission to be themselves and time hadn’t changed that.

“I might have aged, but god help me if that’s all I had in the tank,” he replies and rolls until he’s propping himself over her, her small frame tiny under his. “I’ve still got a few tricks to show you.”

With her hands in his hair and her lips a breath away from his, she smiles and pulls him down to her. He falls and deepens the kiss, stealing her air and grinding his hips between her legs. It feels good. Like home. And he gets lost in her as his hand moves to her breast, fingers tweaking her nipple until her chest rises off the bed.

He follows her cues, lets her lead until she cries out and has to gasp for air. Taking the opportunity to move he slides down her body, lips trailing against her skin until he reaches his destination. Her scent draws him in and his fingers pull her panties down, discarding them on the floor. A hand on her knee and the other at her hip, he pushes her leg up and out of the way, tongue slipping between her folds.

Her body jumps at the contact, fingers tangling in his hair as he gets closer and works his mouth on her core. She keens and twists, his

hand on her hip holding her in place as he licks and suckles at her sensitive nub. His fingers soon join his ministrations and he slides one home, curling it back towards him and dragging a moan from her throat.

“Jesus, Hopper!” She jolts as he adds a second finger, pressing against a spot inside of her that she didn’t know existed. Her legs tighten and lift her off the bed, his mouth and hand never relenting as she bears down and comes apart. The shout that spills out of her is primal, her knees closing around his head as her hips buck against his face. He rides it out and when she shivers, finally spent, he pulls his fingers free and noses his way back up to her cheek.

“Not too shabby, eh?” He laughs against her neck, nuzzling as her breathing starts to calm. She rubs a hand across her face and then turns to him, wide eyed and alive.

“Christ, Jim,” she hisses and leans in for a kiss. Her taste on his lips spurs her onward and she shifts to straddle him, sitting up on his abdomen and grazing her fingers across his chest.

“When did you become so religious?” He jokes as his hands grip her hips to hold her in place. Her ass brushes against his hard-on, insistent and trapped, and he tries to keep his head about him as her wetness presses on his belly.

“Not religious, just stuck at a basic vocabulary right now,” she replies. Her smirk is telling and he doesn’t stop her when she slides her hips backwards until she’s resting on his length, his boxers the only thing keeping them apart. It drives him crazy and he can’t stop himself from thrusting up against her, his fingers bruising as he holds her in place. “Mmm, I see the feeling is mutual,” Joyce chides and then lifts herself up and off the bed.

Hands on his hips she pulls his boxers off him with an efficiency that he admires, her tiny frame crawling back over him and stopping to press brief kisses as she goes. When she gets to his cock she doesn’t hesitate, her lips pressing to its tip and her tongue snaking out to collect the fluid that gathers there. He hisses at the contact, bucking inadvertently as she looks up at him. She debates taking him in her mouth, holding him there until he falls apart, but she doesn’t want

this to be over yet.

“It’s a dangerous game that you’re playing there, Joycie,” he calls, invoking her childhood nickname. She smiles and licks up his shaft, pulling back and then continuing her trip up his body.

“I haven’t heard that name in years, Jimmy. Are you sure you want us to go back that far? I thought we were having a good time in this memory,” she sighs, kneeling over him and pretending to frown.

“You’re right. I much prefer this...” He grins and slides his fingers between her folds, teasing her entrance. Closing her eyes, she revels in the feel of him on her sensitive parts before she straddles him once more and replaces his fingers with his length.

Watching him with a heavy gaze, Joyce slides his cock through her folds once, twice, before aligning his head and sinking down on him with a groan. She holds him there for a moment, hands on his chest and eyes closed as she adjusts to his size. When eventually he starts to move, slowly at first, she merely tries to hold herself together and leans her head against his chest.

With his hands on her hips, he quickens his place and thrusts up into her with a steady rhythm. Mewling, she presses back into each of his movements, welcoming him deeper and trying to stave off her impending orgasm. He must see it on her face because he shifts and sits up, a hand coming to the back of her head and guiding her to his lips.

“Jim,” she sighs as he pulls her close, holding her tightly as she crests once more. His hips lose their pace and he grunts, his head resting on her chest as he pushes up into her. He doesn’t last long as her muscles squeeze around him, the warmth welcoming him home until his body jerks and fills her.

They stay joined until their bodies cool, his arms keeping her close as their breathing slows. Eventually she crawls off of him and slips to the bathroom, re-entering the room with his robe swallowing her whole. He doesn’t need words to tell him that the spell from earlier is broken, the laughter and familiarity gone and replaced with a fragile understanding of the misery they were both trying to escape.

"Maybe I should go?" She asks quietly from the doorway, keeping her distance. He doesn't want it to be over. Not yet.

"Come lay down," he tries, lifting the blanket to the edge of the bed. She joins him but maintains an awkward distance, arms wrapped around herself as she stares at the ceiling. "It doesn't have to be a thing," he offers as she stays closed off despite his hand resting on hers.

"I know. It's just - " She pauses and glances towards him, anxiousness in her features. "I've missed you. I've missed you so badly and now you're back and I'm still married and we can't do this again. I can't - I don't want to feel that way again."

"Joyce," he sighs. It hurts to hear her admit it. He'd known it'd been hard on her - it'd been hard on him too - but he wasn't in a place to be that person for her yet. "I'm not ready for anything bigger right now, I don't think. I'm sorry. Just, stay here tonight... We can talk about it in the morning."

She frowns and closes her eyes, pulling the blanket up to her chin protectively. "In the morning then," she replies and rolls to her side, facing away from him. His arm comes around her hip as she blinks away the tears, the ache in her chest silent and painful.

When he wakes the next day she's already gone, the robe she fell asleep in folded and placed on the edge of the bed. Neither of them mention that night again until a too-hot 4th of July party years later has them stumbling to the back of his truck, Bob Dylan on the radio and the chasm between them finally closed after two years of growing back together.